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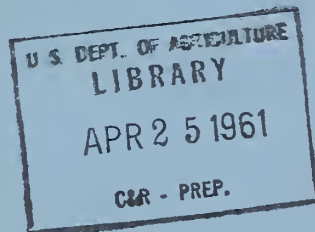
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COMMUNICATION AND THE MANAGER

By C. E. Wylie, Assistant Director  
Office of Administrative Management  
United States Department of Agriculture



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INTRODUCTION

C. E. Montague, a well-known Irish journalist who died in 1928, once said, "Easy reading is damned hard writing." He could have added, "And this applies to every other communication process, too." We communicate badly; yet we all want to communicate well. Man is a social creature, and fulfillment of his social role depends more on his ability to communicate with sources of knowledge than it does on the mere existence of knowledge. This is true of the field of management and managers, too. Good managers are, without exception, good communicators. You might think that one over. In any event, managers must be concerned with the problem of successful communication, for fulfillment of their managerial mission, as well as for their social satisfactions.

We all know, too well, how complex organization life has become. But, have you ever reflected carefully on the incredible complexity of the communications that keep all of the organization's parts in balance and all of its work moving forward? Do you see the communication that is taking place everywhere in your agency, as planned parts of a total system? You should; and you should know how they work or, if they don't work, why. But, first, you need to know quite a bit just about communication. What do you need to know?



What do managers need to know about communication?

Once a teacher was asked what he was going to teach during the coming session, to which he replied, "I don't know; I haven't seen my students yet." What he meant, of course, was that any attempt on the part of a teacher to decide, by himself, what is to be learned, is bound to result in pure guesswork, with the teacher's desired ends being the ones which get consideration. Any discussion of communication which purports to help managers must accept their views of the manager's job, and their appraisal of the role of communication in determining its success or failure. Is it enough for a manager merely to know the general values of good speaking and writing? Can he get by on this or does he, in fact, need a knowledge of communication that is on a par with his other administrative skills? One way to decide this is to examine communication in its general, as well as its organization, aspects.

THE NATURE OF COMMUNICATION

It is claimed that we cannot communicate well because we do not understand the nature of communication. It is argued that to be a good driver, you need to understand the automobile. Whether you agree with this, or not, the analogy is useful in suggesting that perhaps we would communicate better if we knew more about communication.

What is communication? Communication has been defined as "any behavior that leads to an exchange of meaning." Keith Davis says, "It is the way one organization passes meaning and understanding to another. Communication occurs only when the recipient registers the information transferred."







What basic equipment does communication require? All communication requires a sender, a receiver, and a medium. This is basic equipment, regardless of the system. How many systems can you think of? Does each one have the same basic equipment? Radio? Television? Wig-wag, or ships' flags? Jungle drums? Train whistles? Boat flares? Party-line? Our latest effort is to communicate with outer space. Is the equipment different? Basically, no.

How do humans receive their communications? Through the senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. Most communication is received through sight and hearing -- although the other senses are important, too, especially in our personal lives. Our principal systems, therefore, are aural and visual in nature. But what is it in what we see and what we hear that conveys meaning, that makes a message understandable, and transmission feasible? The use of agreed-upon symbols. Each communication medium requires -- and has -- its own code, or set of symbols.

What are some of the many symbols in use? Words, like dog and cat are symbols; so are numbers, music scores and pictures. Man has created a symbol -- sometimes symbols of symbols -- for everything in his universe. There is complexity, yet order, in all this. It is said that the classification of knowledge is Man's most significant achievement -- made possible entirely by his invention of symbols. This has given us the sciences, the arts, navigation, and a good postal system. But its complexity sometimes defeats its purpose. It is a barrier to communication for another reason, too. The symbols do not mean the same thing to everyone -- and it is not likely that they ever will, because of the nature of human beings and the laws of perception.



## THE NATURE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Individuals are different; how often we hear that said. And we say it, ourselves, without really understanding it, usually in a spirit of resignation to the fact that others obviously do not think or react as we do. But why are they different? Because they learned a different set of facts about life?

Each one of us lives, from birth to death, in the center of an individual, highly-personalized universe. Within the confines of his universe, each individual learns from his own unique experience and purpose, and his own interpretation of what impinges upon him. From this he creates a meaningful world of his own which is not held in common with anyone else. He can share this world of his, and all its meanings, with others through communication, but only in part, because they will interpret it differently from the basis of their own worlds of experience.

Communicating between universes, therefore, may not be as new an experience as we had thought. Perhaps there is analogy in individual communication.

What appear to be the limiting, or controlling, factors in transferring meaning from one "universe" to another?

- (a) the nature and capacity of the sender's mind,
- (b) the transformation of thought to suitable symbols, and
- (c) the nature and capacity of the receiver's mind.

What kind of burden does this put on communicators in an organization? What does this mean, in terms of the conscious and willing effort to achieve communication?



For the sender, it means the mental problem of:

- (a) Visualizing the receiver's needs,
- (b) Visualizing the organization's needs, and
- (c) Finding the right words (or symbols) to use.

For the receiver, it means the mental problem of:

- (a) Comprehending symbols used,
- (b) Visualizing the things described, and
- (c) Following the threads of presentation.

#### THE NATURE OF THE ORGANIZATION

What is the setting in which communication is employed?

Contemporary administration is characterized by magnitude and complexity and by the vast social consequences that attend success or failure. For better or for worse the convenience, prosperity, and safety of all the people depend on government, and on the operation of its administrative system.

The needs and problems of communication are strongly influenced by size and structure of the organization, and by the number and dispersal of employees.

A large organization is not merely a small organization that has grown bigger. An organization usually grows in complexity as it grows in size, and the needs and difficulties of communication increase proportionately.

Each unit has its own needs, in relationship to the total organization and the total program. Each unit is a universe within a universe -- yet in appropriate communication with the whole, and with its parts.





Each employee has his individual needs to communicate, and to receive communication, in order to contribute efficiently to achievement of his unit's mission and the organization's total mission. Individuals and their tasks are in carefully calculated relationships which are maintained only by the efficiency of the communications system.

Policies and procedures are in constant adjustment. They are brought into being by executive decision, and they are changed by executive decision, in a never-ending process of appraisal and reappraisal. Like the waves set in motion when an object is hurled into water, a decision by top management sets in motion a host of lesser and lesser decisions.

People and events within the organization are in constant motion, activated, guided and influenced by the decisions and actions of management and by interaction with each other. The training of employees, the delegating of authority, the creating and modifying of systems, the perfecting of skills and techniques goes on continuously, at the tempo set by management. For these activities to be dynamic, purposeful and coordinated, there must be sound direction and good, systematic communication.

Do you know what the terms formal and informal organization mean? Organization charts and manuals are valuable tools of management. They document management's decisions regarding the division of responsibilities among units. They provide formal channels for the flow of authority and direction downward, operating intelligence and grievances upward, and cooperation and coordination in all directions. Supplemented by boards, committees, and work groups, the formal organization provides channels through which all official business and communication are meant to -- and do -- flow.





Informal organization overlays every formal organization. Man is a social creature and, even while he is practicing his official duties, he is responding to, and interacting with, the magnetic field of the social, or informal, organization. There are no records, charts, or membership lists for this organization, but everyone belongs to it by virtue of his membership in the human race. It operates like a shadow behind the formal organization, imposing its values on it, and rewarding and punishing through the force of social conformity. Its system of communication is sometimes so good that the wise manager uses it, when it is in his interest to do so. For it is useful in securing cooperation for the organization, and maintaining for individuals feelings of personal integrity, self-respect and independent choice.

The goings-on in the informal organization, and in the individual universes of men's minds, are impressive obstructions to official communication. It is not surprising that one of the most hazardous-and often dangerous-journeys in life is the trip taken by an idea from one mind to another. The mortality rate is high. Many ideas never make it. Others that do are so deformed and distorted that they can hardly be said to resemble in any way the original idea. Is it any wonder that the manager finds, for himself, that effective communication is his first, and perhaps his most challenging, problem?



### THE MANAGER'S STAKE IN COMMUNICATION

Each one in the organization must bear some responsibility for the system of communication, for understanding it, for using it with competence within his "personal universe." Obviously, the manager must do a great deal more, for his is the final responsibility for the success of the total enterprise, or of some significant part of it. As leader of the enterprise, he must provide the system of communication, and insure its effectiveness.

Chester Barnard says:

"The principal functions of the executive are:

- (1) To provide the system of communication
- (2) To promote the securing of essential efforts
- (3) To formulate and define purpose."

But the first, he says, is to develop and maintain a system of communication.

John L. McCaffrey, President, International Harvester Co., in the Forward to Charles Redfield's book, says: "The executive's responsibilities for communication are identical with his other responsibilities, in the sense that they involve the three classic executive duties of planning, organization and control. But first he must have a grasp of the fundamentals of communication."



How much should the manager know? Clarence Randall sums it up very nicely, this way:

"Not all minds react to the same stimuli, and there is no single means of communication which will transmit an idea to all persons with equal effectiveness. The well-rounded manager will be the master of all media and will know when to use them."

Exactly what are the manager's objectives of communication? Broadly speaking, what does he expect to accomplish through the communication "system" he is supposed to establish? Davis says that:

"The first objective of administrative communication is to provide information and understanding necessary for coordination and job performance.

"The second objective of administrative communication is to provide the social understanding and loyalty necessary for motivation, cooperation and job satisfaction."

How would you interpret these objectives in terms of specific, contemplated results? What direct benefits and uses should we list? Certainly, among other things, adequate communication should be expected to:

1. Delineate and delegate authority
2. Fix and assign responsibility
3. Establish organization
4. Provide uniform interpretation of policy
5. Communicate management's decisions
6. Insure uniformity of procedures
7. Maintain an organization "memory" or records system
8. Facilitate staffing and training
9. Aid supervision and performance evaluation
10. Improve morale and employee satisfactions
11. Facilitate budgeting and work planning
12. Define operating relationships
13. Establish goals
14. Assure policy and program evaluation
15. Promote efficiency







## FORMS AND MEDIA OF COMMUNICATION

Simple examination of administrative communication tells us that most of it either employs the spoken word, or it employs the written word and its related graphic and pictorial forms.

Managers are expected to be expert in both types of communication, and to know when and how to use them with good effect. Although there is a dangerous tendency in each of us to resort to the form of communication we feel most skilled in, a truly expert manager will rely on his considered judgment, or the considered judgment of his advisers, to choose in each instance the form and medium of communication best suited to the needs of the audience and the situation. As a result, he may decide to forego the pleasure of a personal appearance, and to put his message in more enduring form. He may resist the importuning of aggressive, narrowly-motivated staff members for "hit-and-run" or other emergency treatment of an important matter, and insist on complete formality of treatment. Or he may insist on relieving permanent organization doctrine of details and shadings that are better reserved for staff and work conferences. In any event, he will employ, and require others to employ, intelligent, purposeful discrimination in the choice of media, and in the manner in which each communication problem is handled.



Most modern systems are a combination of media -- each serving a distinct and defined purpose -- in a controlled relationship.

What are the basic media, and how does each contribute to the total effect?

- (1) Individual contact, face-to-face or by telephone, provides opportunity for informality and intimacy; for exploration and exchange of viewpoints in privacy, for limited personal contact; for receiving and administering supervision and discipline; for individualizing direction and performance evaluation. Usually no documentation or record is made.
- (2) Staff meetings, work conferences provide opportunity for exercise of leadership and executive role in a group situation; for demonstration of team-play in exploration of problems and evaluation of policy; for bringing the forces of group conformity to bear on individuals; for strengthening staff through exchange of intelligence and participation in policy and decision-making. Limited documentation is made.
- (3) Letters and memoranda provide the means of documenting the transmission of information and decisions to individuals; of memorializing judgments and viewpoints; of recording events leading to policy decisions and other administrative actions. Regulated record retention, with security of information in appropriate cases, is customary.



- (4) Circular letters provide the means of reaching a large number of employees with information of interest to them; announcing operating decisions affecting the organization or its programs; obtaining information and reports; regulating and influencing employee behavior; strengthening morale and understanding; memorializing management viewpoints and actions. These are conventionally used for one-time, ephemeral, non-permanent material, or for emergency release of permanent material. They are characterized by moderate formality and flexibility of format. Variable retention by holders, and regulated record retention, is typical.
- (5) Codified directives provide means of communicating permanent directions to a large number of employees. They
- (a) Provide an official "memory" of, and an organized basis of reference to, the official policies, authorities and procedures in effect at any time.
  - (b) Give effect to major plans and policies, and provide a basis of reference for their continuous evaluation.
  - (c) Ensure the exercise of controls, by specifying the form, substance and frequency of information and the channels through which it flows to points of managerial responsibility.



- (d) Ensure unity and coordination of effort among all groups.
  - (e) Assure responsible performance of duties by delegating authority and assigning responsibilities.
- (6) Reports provide management with a means of evaluating performance and progress and testing policies and procedures. They provide employees with information needed to satisfy their interest in program and management matters, and to facilitate their cooperation in the agency enterprise. Systematically and well-managed reports systems provide organizations with dependable, continuous and economical operating intelligence.
- (7) Public information media tell the public what it needs to know -- and what the organization needs to have it know -- in order to create an appropriate image of the organization and ensure understanding and acceptance of its programs.





What standard features characterize all media in a well-organized communications system? Chester Barnard says that:

- "(1) Channels of communication should be definitely known, or the lines of authority must be definitely established and communicated, by announcements, charts and by habituation.
- (2) Everyone must report to someone, and everyone must be subordinate to someone (for two-way communication).
- (3) The line of communication must be as direct and short as possible. This means -- have as few levels of organization and interpretation as possible.
- (4) The complete line of communication should usually be used. This means that a communication should "pass through" every level of authority, so they all know about it, and can avoid the issuance of conflicting communications.
- (5) Every communication should be authenticated. That is, the person communicating must be known to occupy the position and have the authority, and the communication be recognized as within the authority of the issuing office. This is essential to full acceptance and achievement of the desired action.

What are the desirable characteristics of administrative communication?

Redfield says clarity, consistency, adequacy, timeliness, applicability, adaptability, interest and acceptance, and I would add authority. How important are these?



A downward flowing message benefits somewhat from its accompanying overtone of authority. But, authority notwithstanding, the degree to which employees find a message interesting and acceptable varies widely, and the efficiency of the organization will vary accordingly.

What are some good techniques of communication for the manager to use?

- (1) Probably the very first is to identify your audience and its needs, and to select the medium that best suits them and the circumstances. Do not be panicked into choice of poor media on mere grounds of urgency. Practically everything a manager does is urgent.
- (2) Visual communication calls for exceptional talent because, barring revision, it has only one chance to succeed. The visual symbols we use must have real meaning for the recipients -- symbols that we believe are well-known to them. Illustrations must be simple, exact and complete, if not in themselves, then by reference. Writing also must be done with careful regard for word-meaning and ease of reference and reading. This calls for simple, familiar words, short sentences (21 words), short paragraphs (10 lines), lots of white space, and always the use of headings that enable the reader to find his way quickly among a maze of words. Other elements of format are important, too, such as page, paragraph and item numbers, date of issuance or effect, cross-references, and transmittal and retention information.



- (3) Aural communication calls for the same regard for audience-

identification, situation-identification and choice of symbols (words and word-pictures). It is true that in most aural communication there is opportunity to clarify meaning, in response to audience reaction. We can use more words that mean the same thing, we can lean heavily on "et cetera," "what I mean is," "another way to look at it is," and other devices for propping up a wobbly communication. But we must be prepared to pay the price for our weakness -- its effect on prestige, acceptance and evaluation of the speaker, his ideas and his manner of communicating.

- (4) And let us not overlook communication by action. People are very much impressed by action -- a promise kept, a confidence respected, a smile, a handshake, a kind word. And the meaning of the act is heavily reinforced, or weakened, by the manner in which it is carried out. Action is a morale builder -- or destroyer. The manager's actions often will speak louder than his words.





## THE COST OF COMMUNICATION

What is the cost of communication? Administrative communication in business is a costlier process than most people seem to realize. It consumes a large part of the time of the executive group. Frequently, staff groups exist mainly to fulfill communication needs, and many operating employees, such as stenographers and clerks, spend much of their time performing communication tasks. All this costs quantities of time, money and energies.

The cost to the Federal Government of written communications, alone, was reported by the Hoover Commission to be:

\$1,000,000,000.	for correspondence
745,000,000.	for reports
<u>100,000,000.</u>	for instructions
\$1,845,000,000.	TOTAL

More recent observations indicate that the bill for issuing instructions could easily amount to \$500,000,000, and the cost of pen-and-ink changes, another \$50,000,000. What the cost of receiving, filing and using all written communications is, is not known. But if our employee-readers spent a modest average of 10 minutes-per-page, in reading and using instructions during their total, current life, 1,000 pages of instruction directed to 1,000 employees could cost as much as \$400,000, just to read! And 10,000 pages could cost \$4,000,000. And 10,000 pages read by 10,000 employees could cost \$40,000,000. Is it any wonder that the quality of written direction is so important?

But costly as communication is, its absence would be many times as costly.

Without communication, the organization could not exist because there would be no way to maintain coordinated group effort. The manager cannot function as a decision-center except by receiving information upon which to base decisions and then being able to communicate those decisions to the persons affected.



### SOME BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

Assuming we have a good communication system and management is properly "communications conscious," we still may have a good deal of trouble with our communications. Some of this may be technical -- that is, due to flaws in the system, or in employees' grasp of communication techniques. But trouble also may be expected from barriers erected by humans in the organization -- acting like humans. It is well to keep in mind these facts:

1. Some persons may not want to communicate. They either do not recognize the importance of the enterprise, or they do not want it (or their fellow-workers) to succeed.
2. Some managers communicate too much or too little. It's feast or famine for the employee who needs direction.
3. Some communications treat employees as equipment or property -- and arouse antagonisms, instead of cooperation.
4. Some communications are just "launched into space" with a "for whom it may concern" tag; and no one picks up the tag.
5. Some communications just don't fit, and stir up confusion, conflict and inharmony in unexpected places -- and the entire operation suffers.

### RESULTS OF GOOD COMMUNICATION

Good communication is definitely worth striving for. It is not only personally satisfying to the communicator; it assures to any organization that will practice it, distinct improvement in the vital areas of:

- |                  |                 |
|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Understanding | 4. Coordination |
| 2. Compliance    | 5. Motivation   |
| 3. Cooperation   | 6. Teamwork     |



- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| 7. Production | 12. Reliability   |
| 8. Morale     | 13. Accountability  |
| 9. Action     | 14. Work-flow   |
| 10. Quality   | 15. Working-relationships                                       |
| 11. Accuracy  | And, 16. It increases the total efficiency of the organization. |

### CONCLUSIONS

The need and the desire to communicate are universal. Man has devised many ways of communicating. By means of them, he has improved his life and his world immeasurably. Most individuals are disposed to cooperate in the communication process. But the private universes in which we live, and the complexity of our communication conditions, make the transfer of information from one individual to another difficult and hazardous. This is the problem of the manager, for he must receive organization intelligence, and employees must receive direction. It is therefore the manager's responsibility to establish an effective system of communication, to be familiar with all standard media of communication, and to know how, and when, to use them. Only in this way can he hope, with reasonable certainty, to fulfill his organization's mission and his goals.







